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ABSTRACT

Vocational education and training (VET) has a fundamental role to play in enabling Australia's successful transition to the information economy. Competitive advantage can be supported by intelligent competition and creative collaboration. Governments have played the fundamental role in building a coordinated VET system in Australia and in helping it respond to changing customer needs. Partnerships between the VET industry and the private sector can advance flexible learning in VET. A framework has been developed and represents a strategic plan for the five-year National Project allocation for Flexible Learning. It is designed to support both accelerated take-up of flexible learning modes and to position Australian VET as a world leader in applying new technologies to VET products and services. The framework has a mission and vision. Seven guiding principles are shared benefit, strategic use of new learning technologies, accelerated take-up, strategic partnerships, leveraged investment, employee involvement, and demand driven. Five goals are creative, capable people; supportive technological infrastructure; world-class online content development, applications, and services; enabling policies; and problem-solving regulation. Measures of success are outlined. For each of the five goals, the goal is further described; its importance to the nation is explained; strategies to achieve the goal are outlined; and performance measures are indicated. (YLB)

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flexible learning for the information economy

a framework for national collaboration in vocational education and training 2000-2004

F. Todd

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Australian National Training Authority

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Contents

Background . . . 4

Role of the EdNA VET Advisory Group . . . 4

Implementation of the Framework . . . 5

Acknowledgments . . . 5

Foreword . . . 6

The Big Transition . . . 8

A World Class Start . . . 9

We Must Maintain the Momentum . . . 10

Intelligent Competition + Creative Collaboration = Competitive Advantage . . . 11

Flexible Learning is a Change Process . . . 14

A Catalytic Role for Governments . . . 14

Partnerships Between the VET Industry and the Private Sector . . . 15

How to Collaborate . . . 16

Framework for National Collaboration . . . 17

Guiding Principles . . . 18

Goals . . . 18

Measures of Success . . . 19

Goal 1: Creative, capable people . . . 20

Goal 2: Supportive technological infrastructure . . . 21

Goal 3: World-class online content development applications and services . . . 22

Goal 4: Enabling policies . . . 23

Goal 5: Problem-solving regulation . . . 24

Background

In August 1999, the Australian National Training Authority Chief Executive Officers (ANTA CEOs) endorsed the ***Flexible Learning for the Information Economy: A Framework for National Collaboration in Vocational Education and Training 2000 - 2004.***

The ***Framework*** has been developed by the Education Network Australia Vocational Education and Training Advisory Group (EdNA VET Advisory Group or EVAG) and represents a strategic plan for the five-year National Project allocation for Flexible Learning. It is designed to support both accelerated take-up of flexible learning modes and to position Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) as a world leader in applying new technologies to vocational education products and services.

The ***Framework*** is supported by an annual implementation plan, and the plan for 2000, ***Strategy 2000***, was endorsed by ANTA CEOs in September 1999. It identifies specific initiatives and an allocation of resources within each of the five Goal areas identified in the ***Framework***.

Role of the EdNA VET Advisory Group

In broad terms, EVAG is a strategically-focused group of senior VET personnel advising ANTA CEOs, the ANTA Board, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the EdNA Reference Committee on national issues related to the directions and priorities for flexible learning in VET, with particular reference to online technologies.

EVAG has been the lead national body to facilitate national collaboration for flexible learning in VET for more than three years and has been responsible for facilitating national collaboration in a range of significant areas.

EVAG was established in 1996 as a sub-committee of the EdNA Reference Committee (ERC). Its role was to advise the ERC on VET sector perspectives and responses to national policy issues related to the use of online technologies and on strategic development of the EdNA Direction Service in relation to the needs of the VET sector.

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Implementation of the Framework

EVAG's key focus for the next phase of development will be to lead national collaboration for flexible learning in VET and to ensure that this ***Framework for National Collaboration*** is vigorously pursued.

The ***Flexible Learning for the Information Economy: A Framework for National Collaboration in Vocational Education and Training 2000 - 2004*** is available for downloading at http://www.otfe.vic.gov.au/antafd/cfp.htm

The EdNA VET Advisory Group's Terms of Reference can be found at: http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA/genericpage.html?file=/edna/vet/index.html

Acknowledgments

The ***Flexible Learning for the Information Economy: A Framework for National Collaboration in Vocational Education and Training 2000 - 2004*** has been prepared by the EdNA VET Advisory Group.

The EdNA VET Advisory Group would like to thank Kaye Schofield, Kaye Schofield & Associates, for her inspiration and enthusiasm in facilitating the development of the ***Framework for National Collaboration*** on behalf of the EdNA VET Advisory Group.

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Foreword

As the once elusive concepts of "information economy" and "knowledge society", become our reality, the meaning of the word "learning" is in a state of transformation.

Where once we thought of learning as something that took place at specific times in our lives through formal education, we increasingly understand learning as an open-ended, continuous aspect of life as we embrace the practice of life-long learning.

Where once we thought of learning as a transference of knowledge and information from the teacher to the student in a rather passive relationship in accordance with fixed predetermined steps, we now expect interaction between learner and teacher on the topics of learning within dynamic and best-fitting schedules of exchange.

Finally, where once we expected learning to take place in classroom environments, we now understand it as being amenable to a variety of settings, from a couch in our living room to the factory floor work bench, to the desk in our office.

At the same time as the meaning of learning changes, so does the significance of pursuing and not pursuing learning. In keeping with the information economy and knowledge society analogies, we are moving into a world where knowledge is our currency and the terms *information rich* and *information poor* are increasingly indicative of our material wellbeing and societal status.

Against this background, it is clear that how our vocational education and training sector responds to the demands created by the information economy will have an important impact on the size of any potential divide between information rich and information poor.

Vocational education and training needs to embrace the new meaning of learning in every aspect of its operations. It needs to be accessible at different stages of clients' lives and it must have the mechanisms to recognise and value peoples' experiences as knowledge. Education and training delivery must be through the mediums appropriate to the clients' learning preference and convenient in relation to the competing demands in the learners' life.

To use a now well-known slogan, clients should be able to access the training they want, "where, when and how" they want it.

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It is therefore with great pleasure that we present the *"Flexible Learning for the Information Economy. A Framework for National Collaboration in Vocational Education and Training 2000 - 2004"*, as an invaluable tool to guide us into this new age.

This document is the culmination of work begun in 1995 to make the flexible delivery of vocational education and training a reality for all Australian learners and to assist Australia to be recognised as the global leader in applying new technologies to vocational education and training products and services by 2004.

It is the outcome of an extensive collaborative exercise involving States and Territories, the Australian National Training Authority and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, through the EdNA VET Advisory Group (EVAG). ANTA CEOs endorsed this Collaborative Framework in the latter half of 1999.

We commend the work of EVAG and look forward to implementing this Framework with you to position our VET sector as a world leader in the application of new learning technologies to vocational education products and services in the new millennium.

Meredith Sussex - Chair
EdNA VET Advisory Group

Moira Scollay - Chief Executive Officer
Australian National Training Authority

The Big Transition

Australia, like all other nations, is in the midst of a profound transition from the old mechanized economy to the new information economy. The general trends are clear, the stakes are high and the task is urgent.

Vocational education and training is a vital sector of education and training. At the same time it functions as both a value-adding and enabling service industry.

In the information economy, knowledge will be the international currency of trade. Because of its closeness to enterprises and workplaces, and because of its location at the interface between theory and practice, VET is uniquely placed to develop, disseminate and apply vocational knowledge in ways which value-add to the online environment and enhance the productivity of Australian firms.

As an enabling service industry, VET has a fundamental role to play in enabling Australia's successful transition to the information economy. There are two dimensions of this role.

First, VET must develop the **workforce skills** needed by the new and emerging industries of the information economy so as to increase enterprise and national competitiveness and individual work opportunities. These workforce skills are not confined to the information technology and telecommunications industries but are relevant for all Australian industries that wish to thrive in the 21st century. In a recent study of how 15 different countries support innovation, those countries which sustained large numbers of competitive and innovative firms were better at turning out well-trained people with all the skills their industries needed. Increasingly, these skills will become more sophisticated and will need to be developed in the workplace on a 'just-in-time' and 'just-for-me' basis, in response to fast changing work practices and preferences. Learning to learn will become the bedrock capability of both individuals and organisations.

To fulfil this role well, and in the context of a renewed commitment to lifelong learning, VET must look outward. As a service industry it must work relentlessly to understand and respond to the aspirations of its individual and business customers. As a major consumer of new technologies, it must work more closely with the other education and training sectors - schools, higher education and adult and community education. And it must reach out beyond the education and training industry to other industries from which it can learn.

Second, VET must use the tools of the new economy - **innovative ideas and technology embedded in its products and services** - to move away from the old industrial mass-production approaches to teaching and learning, to offer convenient and customised products and services to an expanded national and international customer base. It must be capable of translating a good idea into a new training product or service that more and different customers want. It must become an admired creator of new knowledge about vocational learning and online services, as well as continuing to be a big user of information. As with other service industries such as retail, legal, medical and financial services, it must exploit to the fullest the potential of new and emerging technologies to help it transform the way it does its business.

In short, business as usual is not an option for the wider Australian community or for VET systems. Steering and managing this transition at all levels of our society is one of the great challenges we face as a nation as we enter the 21st century, and an especially urgent challenge for the VET sector.

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A World Class Start

VET in Australia has every reason to be proud of the work it has done to date to embrace the challenges of the information economy. Reforms to structures, organisations, policies and business processes have made VET products and services today far more flexible and more responsive to their customers and more capable of customisation than they were a decade ago.

Progress in the application of information technologies and communications to vocational education and training has been world-class in many respects.

The National Flexible Delivery Taskforce was established by the Australian National Training Authority Board in mid-1995 to provide advice to the Board on how national action could help make vocational education and training more flexible. The 1997 Flexible Delivery Implementation Plan gave practical effect to the outcomes of the Taskforce, and annual Flexible Delivery Action Plans have led flexible delivery forward nationally over the past two years.

The establishment of the EdNA VET Advisory Group (EVAG) and the broadening of its role has provided a valued vehicle for advancing the flexible delivery goal at national level. EVAG has advised ANTA CEOs on strategic national directions in flexible delivery with particular reference to online technologies. It has also facilitated co-operation between State and Territory VET systems to achieve more effective and efficient use of information and communications technologies and related content and professional development.

Achievements within each State and Territory Training System have been considerable through a range of innovative communication and multi-media strategies and projects all focused on achieving flexible delivery goals. Most States now have TAFE online in some form and the others are well on the road to this goal. They all use information and communications technologies to value-add to VET products and services and in back-office functions. Individual training providers are carving out strong reputations for flexible delivery.

At the national level, especially through the co-operative action stimulated and supported through EVAG, there have also been real results.

- The adoption of a *National Technology Standards Policy* (1997) and *Preferred Standards to Support National Cooperation in Applying Technology to VET* (1999).
- The development of *Multimedia Toolboxes* for Training Packages.
- Two Flexible Delivery physical and online conferences and workshops, *NET*Working '97* and *NET*Working '99*.
- The establishment of *LearnScope* and the *Flexible Delivery Fellowships*, as strategies to provide professional development for flexible delivery.
- A modest but focused strategy for communicating and marketing flexible delivery initiatives.
- Through EVAG, the VET sector has assisted the EdNA Reference Committee to develop the *Education and Training Action Plan* which will serve as the education and training industry's commitment to the Commonwealth Government's *Strategic Framework for the Information Economy*.
- *Online Networks in VET*: a project to research and document the issues involved in establishing, developing and facilitating effective online networks in the Australian VET context.

- *Choosing and Using Technologies in Education*: a research and publishing project which mapped current literature and resources to provide a practical guide for practitioners and managers.
- The completion of a number of Research and Documentation projects, commenced in 1997 and managed by States and Territories through EVAG. These included:
  - *Functional Specifications for an Online Delivery Platform*: a report on the functional requirements for an online delivery platform through which online products and services could be more readily transferred, and which formed a reference point for the future development of the Preferred Standards.
  - *Readiness of VET Clients for Flexible Learning through Online Delivery*: an analysis of the readiness of VET clients for flexible learning through online delivery which established strategic policy directions to conceptualise the relationship between client and delivery.
  - *TAFE Teachers Online*: an analysis of the current and future professional development needs of TAFE teachers and the development of web resources for use by teachers to self-assess their training and skill requirements.

We Must Maintain the Momentum

While VET has made excellent progress, we cannot rest on our laurels or become smug about our achievements. We simply cannot afford to doze off.

Success in the information age goes hand in hand with speed. People now speak of 'Web-years', (three months of the normal year), because of the speed with which the Internet changes. Data transmission costs and computer costs are falling rapidly. Cars that took six years from concept to production in 1990 now take two years.[2] Customers have acquired a taste for speedy responses made possible by new technologies. They expect the same speedy responses from training organisations as they expect from search engines, finance companies, pizza deliveries or architects. They have also become far more sensitive to quality and price differences between products and services.

The convergence of telecommunications and other media, made possible and driven by greater bandwidth, will facilitate the development of a wider range of online services than is now available and create demand for new products and services designed to be irresistible to customers.

However, the information economy is not just about the Internet, central though that is. Other technology breakthroughs such as voice recognition, smart cards, expert systems and those not yet imagined will continue to impact in various ways on the business of VET.

To really achieve the full economic and social benefits of the information economy, digital technologies, particularly the Internet, will need to be as wide-spread as the telephone. The overarching policy task for all VET stakeholders is therefore to encourage the use of the Internet and information technologies where possible and when appropriate to the needs of learners.

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While technological developments are driving change within VET, there is an even more important driver - the needs of individual and industry clients for more flexible learning options. While there remains a good deal of uncertainty about just how clients will want their training services delivered in the information economy, there is no doubt that service delivery must be ever more flexible and continuously transformed to meet rising client expectations.

The message is simple. We must maintain the flexible learning momentum. To do this we must continue to innovate, accelerate the pace with which we apply the new technologies to vocational learning, grow the market for the resulting training products and services and improve their quality continuously.

Australia's history is littered with examples of how we have led the world in knowledge creation and know-how, only to be overtaken on the home track by other more entrepreneurial nations which have been quicker to see an opportunity and smarter at exploiting it.

This must not happen to flexible learning in VET.

We must see ourselves now and in the future as truly world class. We must remain at the cutting edge in the application of new learning technologies to both theoretical and practical VET learning. We have a golden opportunity to become the world leader in designing and facilitating flexible vocational learning. Global learning traders will beat a path to our door, not to sell but to learn and buy from us. The admirable track record of Australian VET indicates this is achievable. Our future success will come down to a question of our strategy and collective will.

Intelligent Competition + Creative Collaboration = Competitive Advantage

Competition between State and Territory governments can be healthy for the VET business and for the information economy more broadly. Healthy competition develops flexible, open markets and accessible trade routes, promotes innovation, rewards achievement and improves productivity.

Each State and Territory has its own strategic agenda for the information economy, reflecting its unique history, culture, assets, capabilities and its own economic, social and political priorities.

Each State and Territory Training System will reflect this agenda when planning for flexible learning in VET. Like other segments of the service sector,

VET is being driven to change by, amongst other factors, competition enabled by information and communications technologies and supported by a pro-competition regulatory environment.

Some see their ability to provide flexible learning opportunities using new learning technologies as a core capability, a fundamental competitive advantage, and one not to be shared with competitors in either the private or public sectors. State Training Systems can no longer be confident that they will continue to dominate within their geographic jurisdiction.

It is unrealistic to expect State Training Systems to turn their backs on this idea that interstate competition in the field of flexible learning products

and services is vital to their future. Indeed it is their right to pursue this competitive agenda. The question is whether this is the real war or just the first battle in a new world where the industrial-age boundaries between domestic and global competition will become increasingly meaningless in an online environment.

However, there are many instances when national collaboration rather than competition could be considered to be a preferred strategy for State Training Systems:

- When the level of investment in the research, development and application of new learning technologies needed by an individual State Training System is beyond its current financial capability.
- When the critical mass of users (staff or learners), necessary to justify the level of investment, is simply not present or likely to emerge quickly enough.
- When an individual State Training System does not yet have the depth and breadth of pedagogical or technical skills needed to apply new technologies to the vast spectrum of theoretical and practical vocational learning by an increasingly diverse customer group.
- When the human and financial resources needed to market technologically sophisticated products or services in the international marketplace is limited within an individual State or Territory.
- When policies or regulations which affect the progress of flexible learning in VET lie outside the jurisdiction of the State Training System. National policies on bandwidth, net censorship and Copyright Law are just three significant examples of this.
- When all State Training Systems face similar problems and consider it more efficient and in the mutual interest of all to search for a solution together. Increased competition to recognised VET from in-house online corporate training operating outside the national training and recognition frameworks is one such problem.
- When State Training Systems regard international VET providers and global publishing houses, rather than other State Training Systems, as the main competitive threat to VET. For many in VET, cut-throat domestic competition tends to divert VET from the more significant international competitive challenge which will accelerate as our technological infrastructure becomes more sophisticated. From this perspective, domestic collaboration is a necessary pre-condition for successful international competition.

These are just a few of the many sound, pragmatic reasons why State Training Systems wish to join with others in different ways at different times to accelerate the take-up of flexible learning in VET through the use of information age technologies, and thus serve their customers better.

At the same time, Registered Training Organisations will have their own approaches to achieving a competitive advantage through flexible learning and these may or may not be the same as those of State Training Systems. From a provider perspective, competitive advantage is a key goal in the face of stiff competition not only from other VET providers but increasingly from other education and training sectors. Maintaining and increasing market share, expanding the market for VET and improving the quality of service delivery are key objectives shaping a provider's competitive strategy.

However, collaboration is an increasingly essential characteristic of the information economy, even in a fiercely competitive environment. Collaboration is no longer an alternative to competition. It is fast becoming a fundamental strategy through which organisations can achieve competitive advantage.

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In the information economy, the creation of new knowledge and its speedy application to the design and delivery of new products and services is at a premium. Informal and formal links between independent suppliers, customers and competitors provide a knowledge-generating network in which the whole delivers results greater than the sum of its individual parts. Shared problems can be solved through networked collaboration, even within an intensely competitive environment. Collaborative learning is the key.

In her book *Regional Advantage*, AnnaLee Saxenian of the University of California (Berkeley) explored why the Boston region, which once seemed set to rival Silicon Valley in California failed to nurture innovation and become a world class industry cluster. Her view is that the companies in the Boston area were too concerned with their own sovereignty. *Too proud of their technical competence, too reluctant to share ideas with others, and too insular to new technologies and ways of doing business that were happening elsewhere.*[1] These lessons need to be appreciated more fully by stakeholders in Australia's VET system.

Creative collaboration cannot be confined to government agencies. It involves multiple linkages at all levels involving suppliers, customers, educational institutions and enterprises spanning the public, private and community sectors.

Identifying specific areas where the competitive advantages of collaboration outweigh the advantages of head-to-head competition is a key strategic task for State Training Systems and for Registered Training Organisations. It depends on their assessment of exactly where their competitive advantage lies - in a technological infrastructure, in human resources, in learning products, in creating learning environments, in creating value-adding services for learners, in customising international VET products and services for a local market and so forth. It also depends on their assessment of the markets in which they intend to operate and the degree of market specialisation they wish to pursue. Different stakeholders will inevitably arrive at different answers depending on their current position and their business plans.

From this analysis has emerged the need for a framework to support national collaboration which will progress flexible vocational learning while recognising that competition from within VET and from other industries will continue to transform VET at every level.

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Flexible Learning is a Change Process

Creating the world's best system for applying new technologies to vocational education and training is, at its heart, a complex change management process. Change projects around the world often produce disappointing results for five main reasons.

1. They do not approach change in a holistic manner. In a successful change program, four key elements - people and their skills; work practices; business processes and systems; and organisational structures, roles and policies - all need to be linked together to achieve the goal.
2. The skills base which is developed to support change is neither deep nor broad.
3. Lack of ownership by those responsible for managing and implementing change.
4. Inflexibility in planning or strategy or management, so that opportunities are not seized when and where they arise.
5. Support for change is not provided over the long-term to achieve sustainable and continuous change.

These five change risks need to be well managed and addressed within a framework for national collaboration for flexible learning in VET.

A Catalytic Role for Governments

Governments have played the fundamental role in building a co-ordinated VET system in Australia and in helping it respond to changing customer needs. They have identified and separated their traditional roles of regulator, investor, purchaser and (through TAFE) supplier of VET. More importantly, they have been engaged over the past decade in the task of transforming VET from simply a sector of government to a vigorous service industry that it is able to operate flexibly in a market environment.

> In the information economy, the old, sharp lines between who does what are becoming ever more blurred and governments now have new roles to play.*
>
> *It is the role of governments to provide an environment conducive to investment in new technology, to the formation and growth of new enterprises, and to the acquisition of information technology skills and knowledge.*

These new roles will require government action at both the macro-economic and micro-economic levels. It involves a range of strategic tasks.

*Governments - both national and local - have new roles to play. They must ensure the supply of high-quality inputs such as educated citizens and physical infrastructure. They must set the rules of competition - by protecting intellectual property and enforcing antitrust laws, for example - so that productivity and innovation will govern success in the economy. Finally, governments should promote cluster formation and upgrading and the buildup of public or quasi-public goods that have a significant impact on many linked businesses.**

VET produces quasi-public goods and services which have a significant impact on businesses throughout Australia. The VET industry's success in developing a highly skilled Australian workforce, and its success internationally as a substantial exporter of VET services, depends on the ability of Australian governments, working collaboratively,

to create the conditions in which the cluster of VET enterprises around Australia can collaborate as an industry to productively compete and innovate continuously. This role is essentially a catalytic one for governments.

At the same time, the old, sharp lines between education and training sectors are also being blurred. VET is, in many ways, at the cutting edge of flexible learning. It has a responsibility and an opportunity to forge practical associations with other education and training sectors to advance its own strategic interests as a sector and as an industry while, at the same time, serving the national interest.

Partnerships Between the VET Industry and the Private Sector

The private sector has a key role to play in our transition to the information economy.

'The private sector is driving, and will continue to drive, the transition to the information economy.'

It therefore makes good sense for VET to think outside the government envelope. VET needs to develop its national collaborative agenda for flexible learning through selective association with ethical businesses which have core capabilities related to the development and application of new technologies or which are key suppliers of goods or services upstream or downstream of VET.

The benefits of private-public collaborations are already evident in the co-operation between VET and multi-media development companies in the creation of Multimedia Toolboxes for Training Packages.

Nevertheless, proposals for private-public sector collaboration sometimes cause anxiety in VET. In particular, many VET stakeholders fear that such collaboration is incompatible with the wider public interest, including the social obligations of government. True, there are risks such as the appropriation of publicly owned intellectual property by the private partner, but there are risks associated with any significant activity. The trick is to follow due processes and establish appropriate systems of risk management.

Moreover, the risks of public-private collaboration are generally outweighed by the advantages which can include bringing market disciplines faster to the allocation of public resources; public sector access to a wider pool of know-how and technology; transfer of some risk to the private sector; overcoming public sector financing constraints; and opening up new market opportunities for publicly funded services.

In addition to these efficiency gains, public-private collaboration will help the VET industry look outwards, avoid insularity and stagnation and create a climate more conducive to innovation in the application of technologies to vocational learning.

How to Collaborate

There is no single preferred way to collaborate nationally in order to advance flexible learning in VET. The particular form that national collaboration takes will be influenced by the nature of a particular collaborative goal and the strategic agenda of the VET players.

Collaboration means different things to different people. It can range from very simple informal activities such as individuals talking to each other; building trust and working relationships through national projects and joint research activities to more formal collaborations such as the development of mandatory standards, commercial partnerships and similar joint ventures.

National collaboration is already a valuable characteristic of Australia's VET system, one which has yielded results in areas ranging from recognition of training to access and equity initiatives and including flexible learning. In fact, the national VET system is itself a collaborative enterprise, recognising the devolved nature of VET provision, shared responsibilities and shared links with industry and commerce.

There are, however, three pre-conditions if further national collaboration on flexible learning in VET is to be successful in moving VET into the information economy.

- First, there needs to be a shared national vision which complements but does not compete with the vision of individual enterprises or systems within the VET industry.
- Second, there needs to be a formal commitment by all training authorities to the principle of national collaboration in agreed areas to achieve the shared vision.
- Third, there needs to be a robust national network of committed and talented people charged with the responsibility of identifying opportunities for national collaboration and finding creative ways of responding to them. The EdNA VET Advisory Group has performed this function to date, largely on a de facto basis , and is now well-placed to serve as the national VET leader for collaboration for flexible learning.

The following framework establishes these three pre-conditions for creative collaboration for competitive advantage within the national VET system.

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framework for national collaboration in flexible learning in vocational education and training 2000-2004

The Flexible Learning Mission

To help our industries and citizens make a rapid and successful transition to the Information Economy by adding value to Australia's VET system of flexible learning.

The Flexible Learning Vision

By 2004, Australia will be recognised as the global leader in applying new technologies to vocational education and training products and services.

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Guiding Principles

The work undertaken through the Framework for National Collaboration in Flexible Learning over the period 2000-2004 will be guided by seven principles.

1. **Shared benefit:** The Collaborative Framework will deliver demonstrable benefit to all States and Territories.
2. **Strategic use of new learning technologies:** Investment in new learning technologies through the Collaborative Framework will be strategically targeted to increase the capacity of VET systems and providers to deliver accessible, flexible and client-focussed training.
3. **Accelerated take-up:** The Collaborative Framework will accelerate the application of flexible learning methodologies within the Australian VET system.
4. **Strategic partnerships:** Partnerships between VET agencies and other public sector agencies will be actively pursued, paralleled by strategic partnerships between the VET system and the private sector.
5. **Leveraged investment:** National funds will be invested astutely to leverage additional public and private sector investment for maximum impact.
6. **Employee involvement:** Collaborative Framework projects will maximise the involvement of VET staff at all levels to foster broad staff ownership of flexible learning practices.
7. **Demand driven:** Collaborative Framework projects will be driven by client demand, integrating current practices with new forms of delivery.

Goals

To achieve the flexible learning vision, State Training Systems will work together and with the Commonwealth, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and Education.Au Ltd to achieve results in five areas of strategic importance nationally.

1. **Creative, capable people:** To build a critical mass of VET staff who are able to use flexible learning approaches to accelerate Australia's transition to the information economy.
2. **Supportive technological infrastructure:** To achieve a national VET system which facilitates affordable access by all communities, learners and employers to online services; is underpinned by advanced information and communications technologies; and achieves connectivity and associated interoperability in the application of technology to delivering training services and, where required, to its business processes.
3. **World-class online content development, applications and services:** To assist the Australian VET system to maintain and expand its share of the training market within Australia and internationally.
4. **Enabling policies:** To ensure that all nationally agreed policies and protocols for VET are designed to facilitate the uptake and usage of flexible learning by the VET industry.

5. **Problem-solving regulation:** In partnership with other education and training sectors, to advocate that the legal and regulatory framework in Australia provides adequate protection for VET learners, removes legal and regulatory barriers to the effective use of information technology in VET and fosters open world trade in Australian VET products and services.

Measures of Success

Achievement of the following outcomes will demonstrate the extent to which the Collaborative Framework is successful in facilitating the application of new technologies to VET products and services.

1. High level of learner and employer satisfaction with quality, quantity and outcomes of online programs and services (evidenced by student satisfaction survey results; employer satisfaction survey results)
2. Increased participation in learning away from an institutional setting (evidenced by participation rates in off-campus delivery)
3. Increased participation in VET as a result of the use of online technologies (evidenced by increased participation of specific target groups who have difficulties accessing traditional institution-based training; increase in overall rates of participation in VET)
4. Increased investment in flexible learning projects (evidenced by dollar investment by ANTA; dollar investment by other public sector bodies; dollar investment by the private sector)
5. Increase in the number of overseas online VET enrolments and revenue earned from those enrolments (evidenced by participation rates of overseas online VET enrolments; dollars earned from overseas online VET enrolments; international sales and/or franchising of online training products and services)
6. Accumulated examples of how the Collaborative Framework has accelerated the use of flexible delivery methods and improved the quantity and quality of flexible learning in VET (evidenced by commissioned case studies)

The capacity to undertake this measurement is limited by current measures and sources in relation to flexible learning outcomes. The Collaborative Framework will give early attention to the development of a more robust suite of measures by which the VET sector could account for its performance in providing flexible learning for all.

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Goal 1: Creative, capable people

The Goal

To build a critical mass of VET staff who are able to use flexible learning approaches to accelerate Australia's transition to the information economy

Why is this important nationally?

Embedding flexible learning firmly within the VET system requires a good balance between the breadth and depth of the VET skills base.

The primary responsibility for developing the broad flexible learning capabilities of VET staff lies with their employers and individual staff themselves. However, as with other industries, strategically selected national activities can provide a national overlay which adds value to employer and employee efforts without substituting for them.

National collaborative activities can also develop the depth of the national VET skills pool in flexible learning in ways not achievable at institutional or individual system level.

The Strategies

Strategy 1

Use a range of professional development models to help build a critical mass of VET staff at national, State/Territory and provider level who are skilled in the pedagogical, technical and managerial aspects of flexible learning.

Strategy 2

Stimulate and sponsor quality research and dissemination to increase understanding in the VET industry of pedagogical, technical and managerial aspects of flexible learning.

Strategy 3

Encourage VET institutions and systems to continuously improve the capabilities of their staff to provide flexible learning services and to use technologies to achieve business objectives.

Strategy 4

Develop international virtual communities of interest amongst VET staff in the field of flexible learning in VET.

Performance Measures

- Percentage of professional development budgets of State Training Systems and Registered Training Organisations spent on developing the flexible learning capabilities of VET staff.
- Proportion of full-time, part-time and casual staff who have participated in formal training and developmental activities explicitly focused on implementing flexible learning practices in VET.
- Extent of national collaboration on professional development for flexible learning.
- Number of publications in national and international journals by VET staff on pedagogical, technical and management aspects of flexible learning.
- Level of staff participation in VET virtual communities of interest.

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Goal 2: Supportive technological infrastructure

The Goal

To achieve a national VET system which

- facilitates affordable access by all communities, learners and employers to online services;
- is underpinned by advanced information and communications technologies; and
- achieves connectivity and associated interoperability in the application of technology to delivering training services and, where required, to its business processes.

Why is this important nationally?

VET is a key hub into the Australian community and into industry. VET providers will require access to an advanced information infrastructure, (including high bandwidth, cable, fibre optics, satellite and telecommunications) at reasonable cost to maximise flexible vocational learning opportunities for all Australians.

As the report on *Preferred Standards to Support Cooperation in Applying Technology to VET* advises, interoperability allows universal access, promotes the sharing of content and resources across the VET sector, achieves efficiencies and, at the learner level, *...encourages the development of team processes, collaborative working and peer-to-peer learning* which help learners take greater responsibility for shaping their own learning.

The future growth and national and international competitiveness of the VET industry, as with so many other industries, will depend on substantial investment in advanced technological infrastructure.

The Strategies

Strategy 5

Conduct ongoing review, update and communication of preferred standards and guidelines in VET.

Strategy 6

Forge strategic partnerships to advocate for:

- reduced communications costs for VET;
- access by all VET providers and learners to adequate levels of bandwidth; and
- access to VET online services from workplaces and homes.

Strategy 7

Facilitate ready affordable access for VET staff and students to the technology infrastructure necessary to increase the quality and quantity of VET services available through flexible learning methodologies.

Performance Measures

- The extent to which preferred VET standards are utilised by State Training Systems.
- Extent and quality of access by VET staff to globally networked terminals.
- Costs to State Training Systems of data transmission.
- Costs to VET learners of access to VET online services.
- Proportion of capital investment targeted to technological infrastructure.

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Goal 3: World-class online content development applications and services

The Goal

To assist the Australian VET system to maintain and to expand its share of the training market within Australia and internationally.

Why is this important nationally?

The delivery of training programs and services to customers is the core business of VET. The working futures of over one million individuals, the businesses within which they work, and the communities within which they live depend, to a high degree, on the ability of VET to do its core business.

In an increasingly competitive domestic market, and faced with the threat of substantial international competition using online technologies, VET must ensure that:

- its programs and services are of high quality and yet price competitive;
- the complex capabilities required by all people in an information economy are developed using the tools and collaborative learning processes of the information economy; and
- in the interests of Australian jobs and culture, Australian providers capture a significant share of the Australian and international market in online training products and services.

The Strategies

Strategy 8

Establish and promote the use of a quality assurance framework, including national protocols for nationally funded projects, for the development and implementation of online VET programs.

Strategy 9

Sponsor the development a significant body of nationally developed online content which is flexible, interoperable nationally and is informed by and informs developments in other education and training sectors.

Strategy 10

Ensure efficient access to and distribution of flexible learning products and services within the national VET system.

Strategy 11

Through an e-VET marketing consortium, create a demand for Australian online training products and services in the global marketplace.

Strategy 12

Apply an holistic and broad-based approach to develop online support services which complement and support direct training delivery.

Performance Measures

- Balance of trade in VET online products and services.
- The proportion of nominal Student Contact Hours (SCH) assigned to flexible delivery arrangements which do not require attendance at an RTO's premises.
- Extent of use of information and communications technology by RTOs in the delivery of VET programs, applications and services, as demonstrated by independent national survey/s.
- Number and significance of strategic alliances between the national VET system and private sector suppliers of content and services.

Goal 4: Enabling policies

The Goal	To ensure that all nationally agreed policies and protocols for VET are designed to facilitate the uptake and usage of flexible learning by the VET industry.
Why is this important nationally?	Flexible learning, by its very nature, is not a stand-alone objective. It influences and is influenced by all developments within the VET system and by interaction with other education and training sectors. Government resource allocation or purchasing models can act as an incentive or disincentive to flexible learning. Conversely, the need to accelerate flexible learning has implications for how purchasing or resource allocation models are conceived. There are similar two-way impacts in areas such as capital investment policies, quality assurance systems, recognition policies, access and equity policies and so forth. As an essential strategy to achieve the overarching objectives of the national VET system, the impact on flexible learning of VET policies and protocols must be considered systematically.
The Strategies	**Strategy 13** Assess the implications of online delivery for key VET policies and advise the ANTA CEOs on them.
Performance Measures	Extent to which VET policies encourage/facilitate providers and systems wishing to use online technologies and other flexible learning techniques to meet training needs.

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Goal 5: Problem-solving regulation

The Goal

In partnership with other education and training sectors, to advocate that the legal and regulatory framework in Australia

- provides adequate protection for VET learners;
- removes legal and regulatory barriers to the effective use of information technology in VET; and
- fosters open world trade in Australian VET products and services.

Why is this important nationally?

In a nation moving rapidly to market-based approaches to regulation, the impact of the legal and regulatory framework being established for the information economy is of fundamental interest to the education and training sector generally and to VET specifically. Market rules are being established by governments (the Commonwealth government in particular) to facilitate the information economy in areas such as telecommunications, intellectual property, privacy, electronic transactions, data protection, consumer rights and industry regulation.

These rules will impact significantly on how flexible learning is organised and managed in VET and on the future competitiveness of the VET industry.

The interests of the VET sector must be clearly articulated by VET itself and fully recognised in national discussion of the preferred legal and regulatory framework.

The Strategies

Strategy 14

In partnership with other education and training sectors, facilitate knowledge and understanding within the VET industry of relevant legal and regulatory issues so that the VET industry communicates its preferred position to government, the education and training community and all participants in the VET system.

Performance Measures

- Representation and influence of the VET sector in key decision-making forums dealing with regulatory regimes relevant to flexible learning.
- Cost of access to the Internet to VET institutions, homes and workplaces.

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Endnotes

1 A study by Richard Nelson of Columbia University New York and Nathan Rosenberg, Stanford University California, cited in *The Economist*, "Survey of Innovation in Industry", February 20 1999, p.12

2 *The New Economy Index*, Progressive Policy Institute, URL: www.dlcppi.org

3 Cited in *The Economist*, "Survey of Innovation in Industry", February 20 1999, p. 22

4 Porter, M. (1998), "Clusters and the New Economics of Competition", *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1998, p.90

5 National Office of Information Economy (1998), *A Strategic Framework for the Information Economy- Identifying Priorities for Action*

6 Porter, M. (1998), "Clusters and the New Economics of Competition", *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1998, p.89

7 National Office of Information Economy (1998), *A Strategic Framework for the Information Economy- Identifying Priorities for Action*

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